

# HOW PRODUCING COSTS OF THE DRAMA HAVE SOARED

Many Items Exceed 500 Per Cent., Notably Scenery and Gowns, While Salaries Have Doubled and Expenses of Road Companies Have Pyramided--Revivals Furnish True Guide of Increased Outlays

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

PERHAPS the theatre managers would face the season with less apprehension were there only the increased cost of production to worry them. But with the greater cost of all they are expected to provide there is also the quite unmistakable intention of the public to pay less for its entertainment than ever before. Lee Shubert told a reporter for THE NEW YORK HERALD the other night that he detected no element in the present troubled state of the theatre business so definite as the determination of the playgoers to pay as little as possible for their pleasure. He continued that theatre prices must come down, and his firm is actively moving in this direction.

But how can such a thing be accomplished when the cost of production has soared beyond the expectations of the most pessimistic prophet? During the last decade railway fares have so mounted that it costs just twice as much as it did to carry a company about the country. The cost of transporting scenery and other indispensable belongings of a theatrical company have increased at the rate of almost 400 per cent.

## Production Costs Gone Up 500 Per Cent. on Everything

It is true that the details mentioned here do not come importantly into consideration in the case of shows intended solely for the amusement of New Yorkers. Yet there are other increases here that are just as much of a trial to the manager. Canvas on which scenery is painted has increased 500 per cent. in cost during the last six years. Then the salaries of the players! Any manager will tell you that the number of actors has greatly increased during recent seasons. There are even said to be eight players to every one job. The compensation of the kind that any manager wants to engage has more than doubled during the last decade. Yet the public demands that the manager, who is already facing these harassing problems, should also be in readiness to reduce his prices.

These are some of the material problems which vex the soul of the theatre entrepreneur today. The manager of the past, say from a decade to twenty years ago, had no such question to deal with. Nor was he harassed by the economic differences that have divided the theatre people into two camps. George M. Cohan recently said that a manager used to find it hard enough to cast his dramas when he could take any actor he thought suited to a part. But now that there are two parties—a closed shop and the Equity lion altogether refusing to lie down with the Fidelity lamb—nowadays, with this idea to be kept in mind, the work of the manager is twice as difficult as it used to be.

There has just been a concrete example of this kind of hardship about which managers never had to worry in the past. A loyal member of the Fidelity decided that he would not defer to the closed shop demand of the Equity, but would recruit his company altogether from actors who boasted of their allegiance to the Fidelity. Well, he was loyal to his principles, but at what cost to his own interests! His play has been tried in various cities by way of preparing it for New York. It has failed everywhere. Now its author, although an intimate friend of the actor, who has been a recognized star for years, has requested the actor to remove his name from all announcements of the drama. He will not consent to have the work presented as his so long as the actors are able to do it so little justice.

## Difficulties of Casting With Equity and Fidelity Fight On

Here, of course, is a difficulty not in the least connected with the financial side of the managerial profession. But it makes the manager's task no lighter. He wants to be loyal to the side of the profession to which he belongs. The result threatens in this case to be of serious financial disadvantage to him in addition to depriving, before very long, his actors of the employment he had sought to secure for them.

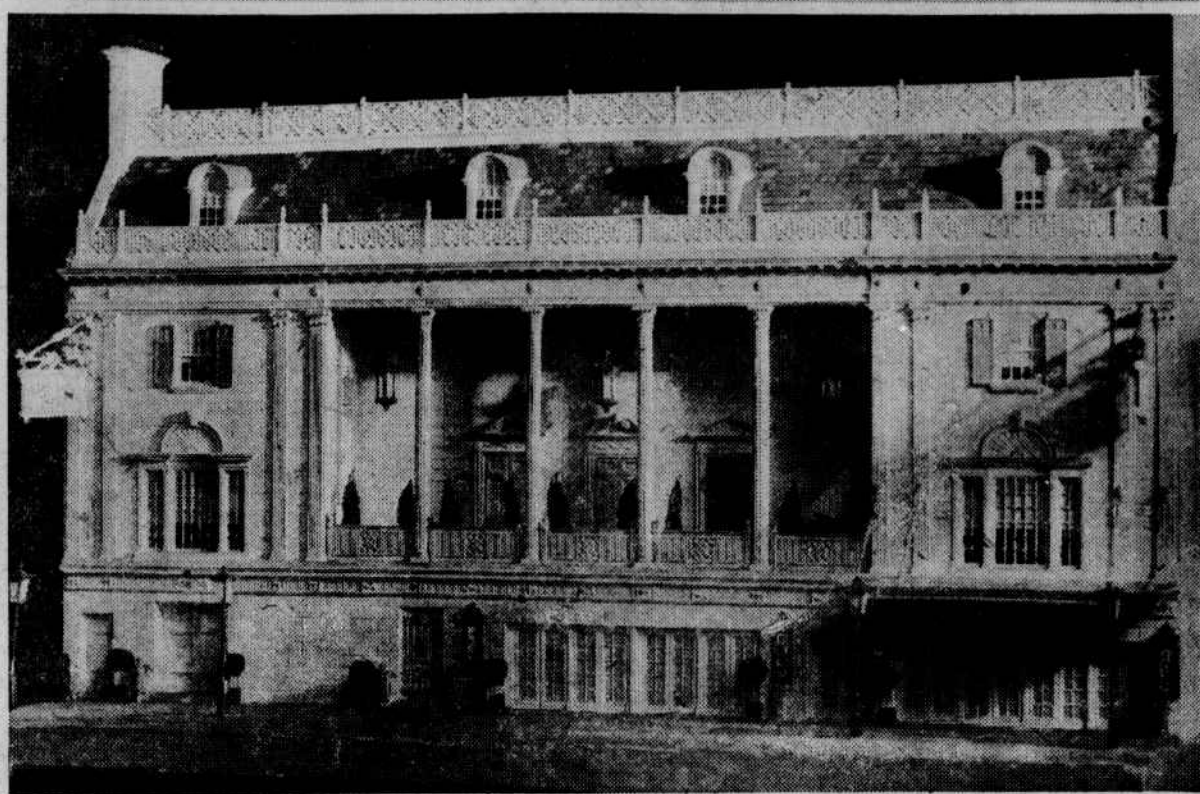
This case, it might be observed, is not isolated. It has its parallels in both of the actors' camps.

The reporter for THE NEW YORK HERALD has collected some concrete examples of the increased cost of production. The burdens of the managers in this way can be more or less exactly reckoned. It is impossible to tell, however, what their difficulties may be in casting their plays.

Some of the figures recorded here show a gradual increase, since they are productions that are made annually. Consider a regular summer classic such as the Follies. The gradual cost of this show is plainly shown by these figures. "Ben Hur" was one of the famous spectacles of a decade ago. It is still historic in the American theatre. A. L. Erlanger has allowed THE NEW YORK HERALD to have some interesting figures on the cost of that play during the different stages of its history.

The cost of women's dresses has in the past ten years increased 400 per cent. Henry W. Savage realized this when he set out to revive "The Merry Widow." Nowadays there is no possibility of appearing

This is The Music Box, New York's newest theatre that cost \$1,000,000 to complete. Weekly operating expenses are \$22,000. The house seats 1,000 and is filled at every performance.



One of the best examples of the increased cost of theatrical productions is "The Merry Widow," recently revived. The 1921 production cost more than three times as much as the first one fourteen years ago. One great item is the costumes, so well displayed in the accompanying cut. Each gown is a "creation" fit for any ballroom.

in stock costumes. It is necessary for the women in such productions to wear the finest frocks. They must in workmanship and material be just as costly as any that are meant to be worn in a drawing room. So only the most expensive couturiers are qualified to make the sort of frocks which are needed in a revival of the kind that the public demands today.

When the Shuberts decided to revive "Florodora" they of course had no thought of repeating the spectacular features of the original performance at the Casino Theatre. By the time the curtain arose on the first night of the revival at the Century the Shuberts had invested enough in this production to have mounted five of the kind seen at the Casino. In the same approximate degree did the cost of reviving "The Belle of New York," which they gave at the Winter Garden under the name "The Whirl of Broadway," exceed the expense of the first performance of this work, which was in its day at the Casino accounted a costly enterprise.

No managers have ever been so daring, however, in facing expense as Sam H. Harris and Irving Berlin in their production of "The Music Box" in their theatre of that name.

Of course The Music Box is the most expensive of the new theatres. Then its entertainment, which is also called "The Music Box," costs enough to scare the life out of any old time manager. There was of course the original cost of the building to be taken into consideration. This was \$1,000,000.

"The production of 'The Music Box,'" said Mr. Sam H. Harris to a reporter of

THE NEW YORK HERALD, "cost \$200,000. The so-called 'pearl number' alone cost us \$25,000. Then the weekly operating expenses are \$22,000. Of this there is \$15,000 to be paid in salaries to the company. Every week the musicians in the orchestra receive \$2,000.

"In order to keep this production moving there are seventy-five stage hands behind the scenes. Their wages amount every week to \$2,200. The rest of the \$22,000 is spent in advertising, printing tickets, lighting, salaries for the house manager and his assistants, treasurer and his assistants and the various other theatre employees."

When Mr. Belasco decided to present Miss Frances Starr in "The Easiest Way" and David Warfield in "The Return of Peter Grimm" he approached the task just as he would produce two new plays. But the whole cost of play production had of course changed and in discussing this situation yesterday Mr. Belasco said:

## Belasco Gives Figures Of Revived "Easiest Way"

"While the high cost of many commodities are reported to be on the descent throughout the country the theatrical business is not included in the downward trend. The mounting cost of theatrical equipment since Miss Starr first appeared in 'The Easiest Way' in 1909 has in many instances increased more than 100 per cent.

"These increases include players' salaries, the pay for those who work in the theatre, increased railway fares, mounting transfer bills and scores of small charges. 'The canvas used in the scenery has ad-

vanced 500 per cent. and every bit of scenery in 'The Easiest Way' is new.

"The salaries of the players have increased from 50 to 100 per cent.

"Since 1909 railroad fares—and this includes sleeper fares and incidental traveling expenses—have about doubled. Take 'The Easiest Way' company in 1909, the New York transfer bill from the Belasco Theatre to Grand Central Station was at the rate of \$6 a load for scenery and baggage. This same service, when the play went to Asbury Park, in this instance to Pennsylvania Station instead of Grand Central, cost \$25.

"As early as last autumn the work was begun on 'The Easiest Way' and this work continued uninterruptedly until the play went into rehearsal. The interior of the apartment Laura Murdock occupies, in the third and last acts, are of course the last word and the cost of the set has more than doubled since 1909. The old set, of course, was completely worn out. The costumes cost has increased about 400 per cent. and in some instances even more."

One of the most notable productions made by the firm of Klaw & Erlanger during its existence was the dramatic version of General Lew Wallace's novel "Ben Hur." In its dramatic form the play has made one tour of the country after another. Klaw & Erlanger made a fortune out of this bold venture. Only last month the cinema rights were sold for a sum said to amount to nearly \$1,000,000. Whatever the amount may have been it was enough to require the cooperation of several of the richest men in the country.

Of course "Ben Hur" required unusual spectacular features, as anybody who saw the chariot race will remember. So, with the cost of the original production in 1899, amounting to a sum between \$55,000 and \$60,000, the audacity of the managers who braved such an outlay was the cause of widespread comment. Last season Mr. Erlanger prepared the play for a season, but it was not necessary to do more than refurbish some of the scenery painted for a recent revival. But that cost in the neighborhood of \$50,000. Mr. Erlanger, in discussing the matter of the increased price of production the other day, said that to provide now an entirely new set of scenery and costumes for "Ben Hur" would cost not less than \$150,000, but would in all probability run up to \$175,000.

"The salary list for the original production," said Mr. Erlanger, "amounted to

\$3,500 a week. And we had the best available actors. The last time we sent the play out the salary list amounted to \$5,500. And the actors were not nearly so well known as those we had the first year, even if it were possible now to obtain any who could have acted so well as those of the original cast."

## Revival of "Merry Widow" Cost Three Times Original

Concerning "The Merry Widow," in her original incarnation and in the costly investiture now to be seen at the Knickerbocker Theatre, Mr. Henry W. Savage told me one reason why the present performance should cost more than three times the first one did, fourteen years ago. "When the original production was made," he said, "stage clothes were in reality no more than costumes. An inexpensive material would serve the purpose of the designer, so long as it was right in line and color. But that has all been changed. Only the best materials can be used in dresses. They must

be as authentic and rich as if they were intended for private use. The same is true of hats and shoes. The designer of our dresses for 'The Merry Widow' used the most expensive materials and the workmanship was of the most careful. Of course, that greatly increases the expense of a production.

"Mr. Wiswell, my general manager, tells me that the cost of scenery has everywhere increased more than 300 per cent. The same is true of costumes. It is for that reason that 'The Merry Widow' cost in 1907 not more than \$31,800 to put before the public, while the cost of the current production at the Knickerbocker Theatre was \$98,400."

There was at the original performance of the operetta at the New Amsterdam Theatre an elevated balcony in the Maxim scene which attracted attention on account of its novelty. It is interesting to realize that without this detail the cost of the scenery is now three times as much.

## ASTOUNDING INCREASED COST Shown by Figures, 1907-1921

New York's summer classic in amusements is the "Follies," which Flo Ziegfeld has produced now to the joy of the municipality for the last fourteen years. The first of these entertainments was given in 1907. The cost of production for this entertainment was \$19,314. The brilliant extravaganza recently on view at the Globe Theatre cost, on the other hand, \$237,000, which is an incredible increase in the fourteen seasons. But it must be borne in mind that Mr. Ziegfeld has not kept to his original plan of mounting this annual review. He has vastly increased and elaborated its decorative scheme. It now includes many more scenes than it did at

first, and the increase in elaboration of all entertainments of this kind has had its influence here. But it is in the final analysis the great increase in the price of materials that has caused the unexpected growth of Mr. Ziegfeld's annual budget. What that has been during the fourteen years is clearly shown in the accompanying statement which Mr. Ziegfeld had his auditing department prepare for THE HERALD. The weekly average expense, which includes, of course, the mechanical forces of his different productions, the salaries of the actors and the cost of the original production—that terrible original cost—are all shown:

"Follies" fifteen years ago cost about \$25,000 to produce. This year's production, according to the actual auditor's figures, cost \$249,687.07.

A comparison of the gross weekly expense of a show like the "Follies" from the beginning of the current year reveals an almost incredible increase. A proportionate increase in salaries and equipment cost prevail in the more modest shows.

## Popular Fallacies About the Strength Of Insects Set at Rest by Science

At intervals there appear accounts setting forth the prodigious strength of insects. Their muscular force is usually compared with their size by stating, for example, that a flea can leap so many times its own length and that an ant can drag so many times its own weight. Then it is said that man, if he were strong in the same proportion, could jump so many rods or lift so many tons. These comparisons, according to the eminent French investigator Robida, are misleading, to say the least.

In his opinion, it is interesting to consider solely from a mechanical point of view these comparisons between the muscular strength of man and that of insects. Strictly from this standpoint they are by no means extraordinary, and are only one of the forms of what has been called "the conflict of squares and cubes." The law is well known—volumes decrease in more rapid ratio than surfaces.

The force that a muscle can exert depends on its section—that is, on a surface—although its capacity for doing work depends on its volume, as is logical. Here is the explanation of the astonishing strength of insects.

As an example, compare two muscles, that of a man and that of an insect, the lat-

ter 100 times shorter than the former. It is evident that the insect's muscle will be 1,000,000 times lighter than the man's, while its section, and consequently the force it can exert, will be only 10,000 times less.

The conclusion is that since a man can lift 62 pounds, the insect will lift 10,000 times less, or 154 grains, and one gets the impressive spectacle of an insect lifting more than 100 times its weight. In fact, the smaller the insect is the more it will astonish us by an appearance of extraordinary strength.

But it is no longer the same if one examines the mechanical work effected. The muscle of the insect, supposed to be one-hundredth of a man's in linear dimensions, furnishes, when it contracts a force 10,000 times less than the human muscle, exerted through a space 100 times smaller.

Moreover, it seems (just as with machines where the smaller are proportionately weaker) as if the insect's muscle, instead of surpassing man's infinitely, is notably inferior to it in quality.

Take the flea's jump, for instance. By its muscular contraction it gives to its mass a movement capable of raising it twelve inches. Man can raise his own weight about five feet by leaping. For equal weight the human muscle thus furnishes five times more work than that of the flea in a single contraction.

## Comparison of Cost of "Follies" From 1907-1921.

	Weekly Gross Expense Average.	Weekly Average Salaries.	Equipment Cost.
Follies of 1907	\$5,500.00	\$3,700.00	\$19,314.18
Follies of 1908	6,800.00	5,000.00	49,457.32
Follies of 1909	7,000.00	5,000.00	56,311.45
Follies of 1910	7,200.00	5,000.00	60,024.42
Follies of 1911	7,300.00	5,100.00	46,510.10
Follies of 1912	7,360.00	5,250.00	46,707.34
Follies of 1913	8,800.00	5,580.00	45,765.72
Follies of 1914	9,200.00	5,900.00	51,874.79
Follies of 1915	12,000.00	7,400.00	68,811.88
Follies of 1916	10,000.00	7,800.00	73,352.15
Follies of 1917	12,000.00	7,900.00	98,163.41
Follies of 1918	14,000.00	9,200.00	138,177.00
Follies of 1919	17,000.00	10,000.00	148,826.33
Follies of 1920	16,800.00	12,500.00	216,855.83
Follies of 1921	24,000.00	14,000.00	237,000.00